

(*perrarum* S1537).⁶ Abenteuerlich ist die Einordnung von *gon* ‘began’ unter *go*. Irreführenderweise handelt das Glossar grundsätzliche grammatische Abweichungen vom neuenglischen Gebrauch auf der Ebene der ganz zufälligen Lexis ab, etwa wenn für *drede* die Bedeutung ‘be feared’ angesetzt wird, nur weil man die Wendung *hyt ys to drede* heute mit dem Passiv wiedergeben würde, oder wenn bei jedem auftretenden Partizip für das mittenglische *of* die Übersetzung ‘by’ geliefert wird. (Entsprechend unergiebig ist die Bemerkung auf S. 224, das *OED* gebe keinen weiteren Beleg für *preuent* mit *of*, wo es sich um eine ganz gängige und keineswegs lexikalisch konditionierte Form der Agensangabe beim Passiv handelt.)

Aus Platzgründen konnte hier auf die Verdienste der Edition nicht in gleichem Maße eingegangen werde wie auf ihre Mängel, doch ist festzuhalten, daß die sprachliche Erschließung des bemerkenswerten Textes deutlich weniger vollständig und zuverlässig wirkt als der inhaltliche Kommentar.

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Gary Taylor. *Buying Whiteness. Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 497 pp., \$ 39.95.

In the film *Hotel Rwanda*, a crucial scene captures the meaning of blackness and whiteness: at the height of the 1994 genocide, when an estimated 800.000 people, most of them Tutsis, were killed within 100 days, the foreign visitors still staying at Kigali’s once luxurious Hôtel des Mille Collines are flown out under UN protection. The Rwandans who have found refuge at the hotel are left behind; no effort whatsoever is made by the UN, the American government or the former colonial power Belgium to stop the massacres. Just before the foreigners board the buses that will bring them to the airport, the action pauses for a brief, terrifying moment, and those about to depart look back at those who will be left behind – condemned to be butchered by the Hutu gangs. And the spectators realise that all who stand on the left side of the screen, close to the buses, are white, those standing to the right, in front of the hotel, are without an exception black. For those who have come together at ‘Hotel Rwanda’, whiteness signifies life, blackness death.

The aim of Gary Taylor’s wide-ranging project is to trace the emergence of whiteness as a category so pervasive that its historicity has become obliterated: to perceive people as black and white today seems natural and inevitable. But, as Taylor convincingly shows, this is a fallacy. ‘Whiteness’ in the modern sense emerged in a specific place and at a precise historical moment. To denaturalise this category, to analyse how and why it was culturally constructed, is not only a momentous task, but one – as the example of Rwanda shows – of continuing political and ethical importance.

⁶ Für die Überprüfung des Originals, das an all diesen Stellen tatsächlich {f} enthält, danke ich Frau Claudine Davie von der British Library, London.

Europeans up to the sixteenth century did not see themselves as white. The term most often chosen to describe the normative European body, i. e. that of an aristocratic man, was 'ruddy'; within the dominant medical system of thought, humoral pathology, a ruddy skin denoted the favoured sanguine, white the less desirable phlegmatic temperament. Ruddy was the colour of the golden mean, while whiteness and blackness were equally undesirable extremes. White skin was associated with the effeminate pallor of eunuchs. Taylor analyses various examples in which 'white' seems to be used in a modern generic sense, but he demonstrates that the denomination is applied to individuals or members of specific groups – before 1600, it never refers to Europeans in general. Desdemona is undisputedly white, in shocking contrast to Othello's blackness; but as an upper-class woman, her status as valuable commodity is marked by her pallor. The 'white' Goths in Shakespeare's other play with a black character, *Titus Andronicus*, are constructed as cultural others in opposition to the normative group, the Romans. Their perfidy and cruelty corresponds to the viciousness of Aaron the Moor. Positive males are rosy-beige; only women are referred to as white in a commendatory sense.

This begins to change as soon as the encounters between Europeans and non-European peoples become more frequent. The sense of a generic whiteness, distinguishing all Europeans from all the others, emerges in the contact zones of West Africa and the Caribbean. The noun 'whites' was presumably first coined by African and American 'natives' who did not care whether they were dispossessed, enslaved and killed by swarthy Spaniards or pale Englishmen. From the contact zones, the generic term was brought back to the European metropolis where it was disseminated via the new mass media, printed texts and public spectacles. "The earliest unmistakably generic, unmistakably positive use of *white* in an extant dramatic text" (125) Taylor has been able to find occurs in Thomas Middleton's pageant *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613). In the early seventeenth century, the new linguistic practice enters popular culture and helps to forge the sense of a white identity common to all people of European descent – and finally, a sense of white superiority.

Taylor's study of the origins of whiteness is meticulously researched and based on an immense amount of documents. Taylor appears to have examined every mention of the adjective 'white' and the noun 'whites' and 'whiteness' in sixteenth and seventeenth century texts, including dramas, travel reports, letters and legal documents. Because of its extensive historical research, *Buying Whiteness* offers an important contribution to the currently fashionable *Whiteness Studies*. However, the field is ethically extremely loaded, and Taylor falls into the trap of postcolonial guilt. Not that there is not enough cause to discuss 'our' historical responsibility, but Taylor's moral commitment results in some rather over-the-top judgements. An example is his discussion of John Locke's contribution to the discourse of whiteness. Locke is accused of three crimes: (1) He never protested the enslavement of blacks and profited from the transatlantic slave trade, e.g. as an investor in the Royal Africa Company (330). (2) His political philosophy was racist: the idea of government founded on a freely entered agreement of all citizens, the social contract, was based on an implicit 'racial contract', the exclusion of groups

deemed incompetent to sign the contract because they are biologically inferior. The nation in Locke's philosophy is white. This makes him, in Taylor's eyes, directly responsible for all crimes perpetrated by Europeans against non-European peoples. Indeed, Taylor compares Locke to the bureaucrats who, like Adolf Eichmann, helped organise the extermination of the Jews (335–337). (3) Locke is boring.

The last accusation seems to be in a different register from the foregoing two. However, according to Taylor Locke's style makes him as complicit with transatlantic slavery as financial investment in the slave trade does: the abstraction and lack of clarity of his writing result in the obliteration of the real human suffering of the Middle Passage. Well, if every academic whose texts are stuffy and muddled can be considered guilty of exploitation and murder, then the profession is in deep trouble indeed. Locke's implicit assumptions about race are well worth to be analysed – and criticised – just as Carol Pate-man did for his assumptions about gender. The trouble I have with Taylor's accusatory posturing is that by conflating a structural critique with arguments *ad hominem*, he generalises responsibility in such a manner that everyone is responsible for everything, and consequently, for nothing. In this view, every Englishman who referred to himself as white in the period from 1500 to 1700, was not so much trying to redefine his identity in times of tremendous historical change, but rather was unwittingly engaged in the post-Columbian genocides of American, Caribbean, and African peoples. The difference between a slave-trader throwing sick 'cargo' overboard and a housewife buying Caribbean sugar is thus made to disappear. But although both acts, as the abolitionists advocating sugar boycotts realised, are connected, they are not equal. It is the task of important historical studies such as Taylor's to work out differences, not to erase them in fits of white malaise.

MÜNCHEN

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Rebound: The American Poetry Book. Ed. Michael Hinds and Stephen Matternsen. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004, 208 pp., € 25.00.

The editors of *Rebound: The American Poetry Book* commissioned thirteen essays on poets from Emily Dickinson to Jorie Graham and Susan Howe in order to change the way we read poems. The New Criticism, anthologies, classroom practice, and "the cultural tendency for subjective investment in poetry" (1) have led us astray, conditioning us to read poems as autonomous entities rather than as components of a larger entity, the book. How many of us, we are asked, have ever read William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" as anything other than a stationary, free-standing poem, most likely come upon in an anthology, rather than as an untitled contribution to the formation of an ongoing sequence? The editors contend that for (many? most? some?) American poets, the book is the compositional unit that counts, and they cite statements by Louise Glück and Adrienne Rich to this effect. In